

Private Group Tour: Vietnam Explorer 12 Days / December 2008

There will never be a better time to experience the emergence of Vietnam. We travel the length of this delightful country from Saigon to Hanoi, taking in many wonderful sights along the way. The cities are full of fascinating museums, mystical temples and busy markets, while the countryside offers gorgeous coast and hinterland scenery. Meeting the people of Vietnam is also a highlight. Their smiling faces, appearing from beneath wide conical hats, will surely be amongst your most memorable images of this beautiful and inspiring country.



DAY BY DAY ITINERARY

Day 1 / 9th December Saigon

Your trip starts today with your arrival in Saigon. No activities are planned until your evening group meeting, so you may arrive at any time. Please check the welcome board or reception desk, located on the ground floor of the hotel, for a Welcome Notice for your tour. This will advise you of your Tour Leader's name, telephone number and the time and location of your group meeting. Normally, the meeting will be at 6pm.

Until your meeting we encourage you to get out and discover the delights that Vietnam has to offer. Make sure that you take a hotel business card so that you will be able to find your way back to the hotel. Please note that your Tour Leader will collect your travel insurance details at the meeting, so please bring them with you. The meeting is generally followed by an optional group meal out at one of Saigon's many fantastic eating spots.

Day 2 / 10th December Saigon

Today we enjoy a city tour, including the Reunification Palace, Notre Dame Cathedral and Ben Thanh Markets. The afternoon is free to make your own discoveries; you may choose to get around by cyclo, which is the local version of a trishaw. The going rate is approximately 50,000 VND per hour but make sure you negotiate a price before setting out. Take time out to relax in one of the cafes on the tree-lined boulevards or enjoy a drink in the Continental Hotel, the meeting place for journalists during the Vietnam War.

Meals included: 1 breakfast

Day 3 / 11th December Cu Chi

We head out of town today to visit the Cu Chi Tunnels. Cu Chi is actually the name of the district that covers an extensive underground network (approximately 200 kilometres) of tunnels dug initially by the Viet Minh and later expanded by the Viet Cong. The tunnels contained hospitals, plus accommodation and schools, and were used extensively for refuge and storage and also utilised as a military base for the Viet Cong close to Saigon. The 1968 Tet Offensive was launched from Cu Chi with surprising effect. A section of the tunnels has been widened to allow tourists to get a feel for what the life underground must have been like. We return to Saigon in the afternoon.

Meals included: 1 breakfast

Day 4 / 12th December

Hoi An

We transfer to the airport this morning and start our northbound journey, flying to Danang. On arrival in Danang it is a 40 minute drive to Hoi An, where we settle in for our three-night stay in this historical 'oasis'. Hoi An was originally a Cham port town, but has been influenced down the centuries by a myriad of traders from various cultures. There is a distinctly Chinese appearance with pagodas and assembly halls scattered along the small streets. Hoi An was once a bustling port in centuries gone by, before the river silted up. Today it is a delightful backwater town with an air of liveliness about it. The tranquillity and charm of Hoi An, coupled with its low tiled houses, makes it one of the most delightful places to visit in Vietnam. It is a constant favourite of our travellers and staff. A walking tour takes us to see a historic house (formerly home to a prominent trader), the Japanese Covered Bridge, a Chinese assembly hall and a museum.

Meals included: 1 breakfast

Days 5-6 / 13th – 14th December

Hoi An

We have two full days to explore Hoi An and its surrounding areas. The market is a good place to buy silk, which can be made up into fine garments, all within a day. Close to town there is a nice beach, which can be reached easily by bicycle.

Meals included: 2 breakfasts

Day 7 / 15th December

Hue

Leaving Hoi An, we continue north for further sightseeing. China Beach, enjoyed as an 'R & R' spot during the Vietnam War, lies against a backdrop of the sensational Marble Mountains. The five peaks, which are actually limestone with marble outcrops, are also seen to epitomise the five elements: fire, water, earth, wood and metal. The history of the mountains is a rich one. They were once used by the Chams for religious purposes, but in more recent times became a haven for the Viet Cong, with its clear view of the Danang air base - at one time the busiest airport in the world. The road to Hue takes us through the city of Danang, before a climb over the hills. The scene from the top of the Hai Van Pass is one of the most impressive panoramic scenes in Vietnam, with views over Lang Co Beach. Upon arrival in Hue we visit the Citadel and the Purple Forbidden City. This royal residence was all but destroyed during the 1968 Tet Offensive, however it is still fascinating to walk among the ruins.

Meals included: 1 breakfast

Day 8 / 16th December

Hue - Hanoi

Hue was once the capital of Vietnam. The royal mausoleum of Emperor Tu Duc and the beautiful Thien Mu Pagoda are not to be missed. We include these in a guided cruise on the Perfume River, which also gives us a taste of the tranquil countryside. In the afternoon we transfer to the airport for our flight to Hanoi.

Meals included: 1 breakfast

Day 9 / 17th December

Hanoi

Hanoi is one of Asia's most enchanting cities. This northern capital is a quiet, contradiction of its southern counterpart. Its relaxed ambience is a joy, with exploration best on foot or bicycle. The shopping is fun and the many lakes and parks provide enjoyable escapes. We take a guided half-day tour of Hanoi, visiting the major sights, including the Temple of Literature, One Pillar Pagoda, and paying a homage to Vietnam's most famous revolutionary, Ho Chi Minh. We have enough time this afternoon to explore the Old Quarter streets named after the goods once offered for sale there, including Silk Street, Rice Street and Jewellers Street.

Meals included: 1 breakfast



Day 10 / 18th December

Halong Bay

You can leave luggage behind at our Hanoi hotel and pack an overnight bag. It is a three-hour drive to Halong Bay, truly one of Vietnam's most impressive scenic sights. Views of sailing junks navigating past over 3000 limestone islands and rocky outcrops jutting out of the bay are nothing short of spectacular. We travel to Bai Chay (Halong City West) where we board a boat for an exploration of the bay, enjoying a seafood lunch and dinner (non-seafood also available), as well as spending a night on board. We visit one cave in the area and, in the warmer months, there is a chance to enjoy a swim. Conditions may be somewhat more communal compared to staying in a hotel, however it is a wonderful experience to be spending a night on the bay – weather permitting, the views at sunset are incredible. Bedding and towels are provided. Some boats have private facilities while on others, there are common showers – sometimes the water is hot and sometimes it's not! There may also be the chance to do some kayaking (optional and extra cost involved) on Halong Bay.

Accommodation on the Halong Bay cruise is on a twin share basis, due to the small number of rooms available on the boats. If you have paid a single supplement, please note that this does not cover the cruise.

Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 lunch, 1 dinner

Day 11 / 19th December

Hanoi

In the morning we sail back to the port, where we disembark and drive back to Hanoi. Arriving back in the capital, we have free time to wander around and enjoy some of the city's other attractions. Perhaps afternoon tea at the Metropole Hotel? For our final evening we enjoy a performance of the unique Water Puppets.

Meals included: 1 breakfast

Day 12 / 20th December

Hanoi

Our tour ends today. You will be transferred to the airport to meet your ongoing flight.

Meals included: 1 breakfast

About Peregrine

Peregrine has been operating adventure holidays since 1977. Today we can help you discover all four corners of the globe, from the Polar regions, to Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and beyond. We offer high-quality, excellent-value, small-group adventures to interesting areas of the world, in harmony with the local people and the environment.

Trip grade

Cultural adventure

With a focus on local cultures and historic sites, these trips are not physically demanding and have the perfect mix of discovery, exploration, comfort and relaxation. Some trips include a little walking or a night or two 'roughing it' - check the itinerary for details.

Included

Peregrine tour leader, local guides, airport transfers, transport, sightseeing and entrance fees.

Accommodation: 10 nights comfortable hotel, 1 night junk boat

Meals: 11 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 1 dinner

Not included

International flights, departure taxes, visas, other meals, any optional additional tours or activities during free time, insurance, tips and items of a personal nature.

Additional accommodation

Extend your holiday by booking some pre or post tour accommodation - ask Peregrine or your travel agent.

Other information

Infrastructure and Tet Holiday Period

Please note that Vietnam is a developing country whose infrastructure may differ from what you expect in your homeland. Expect poor road conditions and be prepared for some inconveniences due to such things as restaurants or tourist sites being closed and our regular transport services not always being available, especially so during the Tet holiday period (Vietnamese New Year).

The official Tet holiday period for 2009 will be from Saturday 24th January till Friday 30th January; however, disruptions can start as early as 1st January and end as late as mid-February. Most businesses will be closed as Vietnamese people usually spend this period returning to their homes and celebrating with their families. This will involve a major burden on all forms of transport, and despite booking in advance, tickets for planes and trains especially are extremely difficult to obtain. Even if bookings are obtained, transport services during this period will be overcrowded and heavy delays are to be expected, so you will need to make sure that you pack your sense of humour. In order to facilitate your travels during the Tet period, we would likely be offering to substitute your train/plane journey with a private bus trip wherever possible.

On this trip you may link up with passengers on other Peregrine tours.

Travelling responsibly

We care about the places and people that we meet on our journeys, and we try to ensure that we give something back, as well as taking away so many incredible memories. For more information on our commitment to responsible tourism, visit www.peregrineadventures.com/about_us/responsible_travel/

Subscribe to e-news

About once a month, we send out an electronic newsletter with news, specials and interesting articles. Subscribing is easy, and you can unsubscribe just as easily at any time.

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Passport

Well before travelling, please ensure that you have a current passport, with an accurate photo, that is valid for at least six months after your scheduled return home. Also check that your airline tickets are in exactly the same name as your passport. Some countries may require that you have a return air ticket, or have sufficient funds to purchase such a ticket.

Insurance

On all our holidays you must have comprehensive travel insurance that covers you for medical costs associated with hospitalisation, emergency travel and repatriation back to your home country. Please take your insurance policy with you when you travel. Peregrine is able to recommend a policy for you. You may take other cover, of course, but we require you to be adequately insured before we can allow you to participate in our programmes. Your Peregrine leader will need to see and record your policy details at the pre-tour briefing, so please bring a copy along to the meeting. If you arrive without travel insurance your tour leader will require you to purchase a policy before you continue your journey with us.

If you are covered by a policy arranged through your credit card company you will be asked to provide evidence of this cover, as well as a 24-hour emergency contact number. Many credit card companies do not provide an insurance policy number. In this instance, the tour leader will need to record your credit card number, as this is required to activate any request for emergency assistance. You should also bring along the travel insurance information booklet provided by your credit card company. It is your responsibility to ensure that you meet the requirements set out by your credit card company in order to be effectively covered and that the cover offered is of a suitable standard.

Visas

Australians, Americans, Canadians, British and New Zealanders currently require a visa for Vietnam. Visas must be obtained prior to the commencement of your tour. For all other nationalities please reconfirm your visa requirements with your travel agent.

It is your responsibility to ensure you have all required visas for your trip. Rules and regulations governing the issuance of visas are constantly changing, and vary for different nationalities and you should check visa requirements with your travel agent or relevant consular authority well before travel.

Vaccinations

Please consult your doctor or nearest vaccination centre to see if any of the listed vaccinations are required: This list is by no means complete and only your doctor or vaccination centre can provide you with the latest up-to-date information:

Typhoid

Polio

Tetanus

Smallpox

Gamma Globulin or Havrix (against Hepatitis A)

Hepatitis B

Yellow Fever

Meningitis

Malaria

Malaria is prevalent in many tropical areas of Asia. Please advise your doctor which regions you will be visiting and discuss the necessary medication with them. All anti-malarial tablets are taken for a period before possible exposure and continued for a period after such exposure ceases, and should be taken carefully according to instructions. It is possible that the people in your group may be taking different anti-malarial tablets. Be aware that some anti-malarial medication may increase skin sensitivity to sunlight, and take extra care to ensure good use of sunscreens. A good insect repellent is advisable if visiting these regions, preferably one containing a high percentage of DEET.

About this information

It is important that you should read these notes in conjunction with the detailed trip specific **Pre Departure Information**. This information is supplied to you at the time of booking and contains extensive information about subjects such as climate, clothing and gear, medical and visa matters, currencies, and other information about the countries visited.

The information provided here is given in good faith and has been compiled with all reasonable care. However, things change and some of the information may become out of date. Please keep this in mind when you read it and check with us if you want to be sure about something. The document was correct at time of printing, but you can check online for the most up to date version. If you have any queries, please contact your travel agent or our staff in Australia. We are here to help you!